

Thomas C. Bailey
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22 November, 2011

Hon. Frank Foster
PO Box 30014
Lansing MI 49770

RE: S. 248

Dear Representative Foster:

As we have discussed, I have been involved with public land issues in Michigan for a number of decades. Through both my work at the Little Traverse Conservancy and as a board member of the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy, I am in daily contact with people about public land and related issues. I appreciate this opportunity to send along a couple of comments on S. 248 which I understand your committee will be considering.

I understand the concerns that are said to be behind S. 248—having grown up in the Upper Peninsula, I am quite familiar with the situation local governments have with large acreages of public land in their boundaries. I also understand some people's frustration with the Department of Natural Resources from time to time. And because I understand those issues, I have some serious concerns about S. 248.

I believe the bill to be unnecessary. There is no need for a cap on DNR-administered public land. Public land is a great asset to our state and while I understand some of the fiscal difficulties faced by local governments, these are problems of our financing methods for government, not issues directly related to public land. In order to have a vital tourism industry, in order to have a productive forest products industry, in order to camp and hike and snowmobile and enjoy the hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities that are a birthright to those of us born in Michigan, especially Upper Michigan, public land is essential. Over time, public land will become more important, not less so.

In terms of local government revenues, though S. 248 has been purported to address the issue of large amounts of DNR-administered public land in local jurisdictions, the bill's overall cap on state land holdings does absolutely nothing to limit public land holdings within any local jurisdiction's boundaries. The cap is completely meaningless within any given local area.

The cap would, however, have serious negative effects in parts of southern Michigan where additional public lands are a high priority. Unlike the UP, southern Lower Michigan has very little public land and a high human population. Opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping, snowmobiling and other recreation on public lands are scarce across the southern counties. It makes no sense to apply a statewide cap on public land holdings when the needs and issues vary so widely across our state.

Because public land is so critical to the outdoor lifestyle we enjoy in the UP, because southern Michigan desperately needs public land for its State Game Areas, State Recreation Areas and State Parks, and because local government fiscal issues relate to revenue sharing and not public land, this bill is not only unnecessary but counterproductive.

I have not spoken with a single person who thought S. 248 to be a good idea.

Thank you for your consideration of my views,

Sincerely,

Thomas C. Bailey